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Memo

To: The Honorable Miguel DeValle and Ms. Elaine Allensworth, Co-Chairs for the Commission on High School Graduation Achievement and Success

From: The Illinois Federation of Teachers, The Chicago Teachers Union, and The Illinois Education Association

RE: Recommendations for the Commission Report

It has been a pleasure to be able to work with the Commission on High School Graduation Achievement and Success in order to study and consider the issues affecting the students of our state as they matriculate through our schools and plan for their futures. After careful consideration, and on behalf of the 200,000 plus members we collectively represent, the Chicago Teachers Union, the Illinois Federation of Teachers, and the Illinois Education Association offer the following recommendations for consideration in the Commission's report.

- Each school should have access to a high quality researched based early detection system for monitoring students who may become at risk of dropping out of school. Such monitoring systems should begin as early as possible as but no later than 4th grade.
 - For at risk students, we must address the students' academic, economic, social and emotional needs in order to help them stay in school and they must be closely monitored by additional counselors and social workers assigned to middle schools and high schools
 - Such care for at risk students must be funded at a level that will provide teachers with either reduced course loads or additional compensated time for collaboration with other school staff to ensure fidelity. An alternative would be to use case managers—i.e., social workers or counselors—to oversee these responsibilities. In no case should this increased attention result in a greater workload for educators already carrying excessive responsibilities.
 - Whereas new technologies found in the state Longitudinal Data Systems and the Illinois Shared Learning Environment can be utilized to assist in an early detection system, funding for such systems should be state wide.
- Ensure that student attendance standards are set and closely monitored with a renewed focus on getting students to school and keeping them in class
 - Educate parents and students as to the research on the effect of truancy on graduation in order to help them make the connection between actions and outcomes that may not be obvious
 - Invest in additional programs and personnel in order to improve truancy issues in all schools
 - Eliminate the opportunity for school boards to set policies that remove students from school except in extreme and dangerous cases



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- Reduce reliance on high stakes test scores and ratings for students, teachers, principals and schools. Using scores and ratings in such a way has been shown to actually work against keeping at risk students in schools and will exacerbate this most serious problem. We need to create school environments that are supportive and we need to use scores for diagnosis of individual or systems based problems as well as to determine the best interventions.
- Adopt high school graduation accountability standards that allow more than four years to graduate for some students with high needs (for example students with special needs, English language learners, transient students, students exposed to violence, or for other reasons which create such need for flexibility), recognizing that some students and some schools may need more time to meet graduation requirements for the diverse populations we serve.
 - Offer students multiple pathways to graduation that will motivate and engage students, including community schools, dual-enrollment programs, project-based learning and career and technical education programs; these pathways to graduation should provide flexible scheduling to accommodate students' social and economic needs, including extended time to graduate
 - Leverage resources and facilitate access to wraparound services, mentors and workplace learning opportunities
 - Differentiate support for students as necessary
- Provide time, training and support to teachers of all grade levels, which includes embedded professional development, connected to the recognition of the early warning indicators and provide access to research based, high quality, proven techniques and strategies so that teachers and schools can make meaningful and productive interventions.
 - Invest in access to high-quality research based opportunities including extended learning time; intensive academic supports; language acquisition programs for English language learners; ninth-grade transition strategies; credit-recovery opportunities; and continuous mentoring.

For comments or questions please contact:

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